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# Montgomery Holds Statewide Mental Health Conference

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by Josh Ninke (<http://www.alabamaneews.net/bios/Josh-Ninke>)



(<http://live-alabamaneews.pantheon.io/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/MENTALCONFERENCE.png>) Montgomery's Mental Health Conference was packed with state and local officials, including state prison director Jeff Dunn and Montgomery County Sheriff Derrick Cunningham.

The day started off with state mental health commissioner Jim Perdue, who looked at how far we've come.

"Someone was mentally ill they were taken to a hospital and left. they were taken to different facilities and never returned. People had children or siblings that they never saw again," said Perdue.

He said it comes down to more than just how much money is thrown at the problem.

It takes a community embracing those who struggle with mental illnesses and addiction.

Montgomery health czar Michael Briddell was one of the hosts for the event.

In years past, the city has struggled with obesity, and he says this is a similar problem that affects every city.

“We wrestle with this issue the same way cities all across Alabama, all across the united states do. And Josh, it permeates into every other aspect you can imagine. It impacts us in a budget format, it overcrowds our court system, it overcrowds our jails,” said Briddell.

And that’s why keynote speaker and former congressman Patrick Kennedy says the law needs to help these people.

Kennedy struggled with addiction and mental illness himself for many years.

He championed a parity law that guarantees access to mental health and addiction services.

“So this is an epidemic, we can’t stick our heads in the sand any longer. Alabama has a lot of work to do. There’s great opportunity for us to make a change down here in Alabama and force this parity law and no longer allow insurance companies to deny care and leave people to die essentially,” said Kennedy.

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